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Plot Is Aimed At Toppling Haiti's Duvalier

An incredible plot is in the works to end the dictatorial regime of Haitian President Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier.

These are the bizarre ingredients: An American soldier of fortune, a handpicked team of international mercenaries, a group of Haitian exiles and some Italian businessmen looking for a fast buck.

Duvalier is known to be worried to the point of paranoia over the possibility that he will be assassinated. He has been publicly warned that there is a plot against him. In late October three light planes flew over his unhappy country and dumped tons of literature proclaiming the dictator's imminent downfall.

Whether it was the Italo-American-Haitian plot that was the specific cause of Baby Doc's alarm is not clear. Maybe he doesn't even know about this one. But here's the story, as reported by my associates Dale Van Atta and Bob Sherman.

The soldier of fortune is John Dutcher, a rugged 40-year-old ex-Marine and self-proclaimed assassin who used to work for fugitive ex-CIA

agent Edwin Wilson. I reported last August that Dutcher once identified himself as a "mercenary specializing in protection, training and hostage retrieval missions for foreign governments."

In mid-September, Dutcher was sent by Wilson to northern Italy to negotiate a Libyan construction contract with some Milan businessmen. While he was there, he met some Haitian exiles who want to get rid of Duvalier.

Dutcher agreed not only to recruit mercenaries in Britain and South Africa but to purchase arms for the coup. The cost was calculated at \$2 million, which the two Italian companies agreed to advance. A source close to the deal explained that the Italians had been promised lucrative construction contracts in return for financing the coup.

The plotters have picked Duvalier's successor. He is Roland Magloire, a former Haitian army lieutenant and the nephew of Paul Magloire, who was president of Haiti from 1950 to 1956. Scheming against Baby Doc and his late father, Papa Doc Duvalier, is nothing new for Roland Magloire. He has been involved in several attempted coups. In the late 1960s, he spent a year in jail in the Bahamas as the result of a botched invasion of Haiti.

Dutcher could not be located for comment, but Magloire returned a call from Montreal late one night.

Surprisingly, he did not deny that a coup was being planned. At first, he professed not to know Dutcher, but then he said, "Maybe I do, but under some other name." When presented with details of the plot, he said coyly, "Maybe it is possible that something is going to happen."

Sources in the Haitian exile community tell me that Magloire has always been committed to the idea of overthrowing Duvalier by force. In fact, they say, his insistence on a military ouster led to the breakup of the "Haitian Coalition," an emigre group dedicated to Duvalier's downfall. Magloire's opponents wanted to arrange a less bloody coup within Haiti.

Whoever wins—Duvalier or Magloire—it seems likely the wretched Haitian people will still lose. Exile sources say that a Magloire victory would merely replace one dictatorship with another. A military showdown between the two adversaries would be a contest the long-suffering Haitian populace could view with evenhanded dispassion—like the henpecked frontiersman of legend, who greeted the sight of his wife and a grizzly bear locked in mortal combat with encouraging cries of "Go wife! Go bear!"

Footnote: The anti-Duvalier plot is one bit of skulduggery that cannot be laid at Ed Wilson's door. Dutcher quit Wilson's employ when the Haitian deal was cut.